

OHIO SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' HOME,
LIBRARY
(Ohio Veterans' Home, Library)
U. S. Route 250 at DeWitt Avenue
Sandusky
Erie County
Ohio

HABS No. OH-2360-E

HABS
OHIO
22-SAND,
1E-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

OHIO SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' HOME, HABS NO. OH-2360-E
LIBRARY

~~(Ohio Veterans' Home Library)~~

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OHIO
22-SAND
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Location: U.S. Route 250 at DeWitt Avenue, Sandusky, Erie Co.,
Ohio 44870

USGS Sandusky Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.359360.4586510

Present Owner: State of Ohio, Department of Administrative Services

Present Occupant: Ohio Veterans' Home

Present Use: Residential and nursing/medical facility for Ohio
military veterans

Significance: The Ohio Veterans' Home was established in 1886 as the
Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, the result of efforts
by the Grand Army of the Republic to ensure state care
for sick and destitute Ohio Civil War veterans. The
Home opened in November, 1888 with 17 residents.
During its peak years it had over 2,000 residents, and
since its opening it has served over 55,000 Ohio
veterans from all major U.S. conflicts. The name was
changed to Ohio Veterans' Home in 1979. Current
population is about 550.

The Home is the legacy of Ohio's movement in the 19th
century to establish state-supported institutions to
aid the handicapped, the ill and the destitute.

For an overview of the Home, see HABS No. OH-2360.

The Library was completed about 1891 as the principal
cultural and educational facility at the Home. It
had over 5,000 volumes and had newspapers from each
of Ohio's 88 counties. Its second floor had a meeting
room for use by the local G.A.R. post and other organi-
zations. The Library has been vacant for several
years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection:

The library was completed about 1891.

2. Architect:

Construction of the entire Home was under the supervision of Henry C. Lindsay, architect, of Zanesville, Ohio. Landscaping and design of the grounds was by Herman Haerline of Cincinnati.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

The Home has always been owned by the State of Ohio and was created by an act of the state legislature in 1886.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

The firm of Douzbach & Decker constructed the library at a cost of \$11,608.07.

5. Original plans and construction:

The Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home resulted from an act of the legislature in 1886 which created a board of trustees empowered to select a site and arrange for construction of the Home. The board was further required to oversee operation of the Home after its completion.

The act resulted from efforts by the Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Ohio, to provide care for honorably discharged Ohio Civil War veterans who were disabled or required other assistance in living. The G.A.R., formed by Union Army veterans immediately after the Civil War, became a formidable lobbying force at both the state and the national levels, and it aggressively looked after veterans' interests for many years.

Starting July 1, 1886, the new board reviewed sites in 14 Ohio communities. On July 30, after eight ballots, Sandusky received three of five board member votes and was chosen as the Home's location. 100 acres three miles southeast of the downtown area were acquired, and the City of Sandusky agreed to lay water, sewer and gas lines and to ensure extension of a street railway to the site.

Seven architects submitted sketches of proposed designs for the Home, and on September 1, 1886 Henry C. Lindsay was selected as

architect for the project. On the same day, Herman Haerline was chosen as Landscape Engineer.

Haerline's plans for the grounds were approved by the board on March 1, 1887. On March 17, the board approved Lindsay's designs for the administration building, dining hall, laundry, bath house, boiler house, chapel, hospital, and three styles of residential cottages. There were to be twelve cottages, four in each of the three styles (eventually sixteen were built).

Contracts for the first buildings, some of the cottages, were awarded on April 20, 1888. A cornerstone laying took place on July 20, 1888. The Home opened on November 19, 1888, with 17 residents. The mess hall, boiler house, laundry and cottage "F" were then complete.

In May of 1889, the board authorized construction of the stable, surgeon's cottage, quartermaster's cottage, and workshops. In September of 1890, Lindsay was instructed to prepare plans for a library and an assembly hall.

All the principal buildings were constructed of local Sandusky blue limestone, quarried on the site. The quarries, in the western portion of the grounds, today are three large duck ponds. Construction continued until 1908, though most of the major buildings were completed by 1894.

The precise completion date of the library is not known, but some time in 1891 is a reasonable estimate, based on the fact that the architect was instructed to prepare plans in September of 1890.

6. Alterations and additions:

There have been no additions to the library. There have been no significant interior alterations, but there have been several exterior alterations.

The original slate roof was replaced with a red asphalt shingle roof at an unknown date. Probably during this roof work, wall dormers at the building's rounded corners were removed, and decorative elements (which probably also served as chimneys) in the form of small clustered columns were removed from the parapets of the east and west elevations.

B. Historical Context:

Ohio was a leader in establishing state institutions for the handicapped and disabled. As early as the 1820s, the state had established a facility for the care and education of the deaf, and other similar institutions followed during the

mid-nineteenth century. By the 1870s there were facilities for the deaf, the blind, the mentally retarded and the insane. These were generally headquartered in Columbus, the capital, but branch institutions were established in other parts of Ohio as well.

The Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home was an extension of this government-supported "helping hand" attitude, an attitude strongly urged along, in this case, by the lobbying efforts of the Grand Army of the Republic. The G.A.R., formed by Union Army veterans shortly after the end of the Civil War, disavowed any political ambitions or purpose, but in fact the organization vociferously fought for and protected Union veterans' interests. In such areas as unpaid enlistment bounties, care of deceased veterans' orphans, establishment of memorials, construction of county memorial buildings, and veterans' pensions, the G.A.R. was a potent force throughout the late 19th century and into the 20th. Spurred by a sense of obligation to the former soldiers and sailors who had preserved the Union in the 1860s (something which G.A.R. members were happy to remind people), both the national and state governments responded generously. They established veterans' and orphans' homes, war memorials, and memorial meeting halls, and they appropriated aid for indigent soldiers and their families, provided for burial of deceased veterans, and passed laws giving state employment preference to honorably discharged veterans.

The G.A.R. was organized along military lines, with commanders and quartermasters and the like, and with statewide organizations known as departments. Each state department was composed of various local organizations known as posts, membership in which might range from just a few men in small towns to several thousand in the large cities. Histories of the G.A.R. indicate that recruitment of members and then getting members to attend meetings and support the organization were a continuing source of trouble. However, even in periods of low membership and seemingly little potential political influence, the G.A.R. was able to accomplish a remarkable amount and achieve many of its goals. This was perhaps aided by the fact that many public figures and politicians were G.A.R. men and were thus a ready audience for the appeals of the "old soldiers."

The G.A.R.'s Department of Ohio came into being with the organization of the first posts in mid-1866. Records apparently are incomplete as to which was the first post, but organization proceeded rapidly and the first Annual Encampment (meeting) was held in Columbus in January of 1867, with 135 posts reported as having been created. Membership increased rapidly at first, then declined, probably as a result of gradual cooling of war passions as time went on. At the end of 1868, 303 posts were reported in Ohio, but by 1873 there were only 19 posts, with 800 members.

This fell to eight posts and 368 members by 1875.

Remarkably, membership increased dramatically in the 1880s. By the end of 1881, 200 posts with 8,647 members were reported, and by late 1884 there were nearly 28,000 Ohio members of the G.A.R. This rapid increase matched what was occurring in the organization nationally. Membership hovered between 27,000 and 30,000 nationally until the late 1870s, then shot up to 365,000 by 1887. This appears to have been due to the aging of the Civil War veteran population and the realization that G.A.R. membership could enhance one's social and economic situation late in life.

The Department of Ohio could claim a number of accomplishments, even during its lean years of low membership. Those who were members in the late 1860s and early 1870s appear to have been energetic and astute politically. Their greatest accomplishment of the period was establishment of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphans' Home at Xenia, Ohio in the early 1870s. Other lobbying efforts directed at the Ohio legislature during the 1870s resulted in relief from taxation for real estate used by G.A.R. posts; provision of state support for indigent soldiers and sailors and their families; state payment of burial costs for veterans; construction of numerous war memorials and memorial meeting halls; and preference in state employment.

The Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home at Sandusky was a direct result of G.A.R. lobbying. At Ohio's 1886 Annual Encampment, Department Commander R.B. Brown reported that as a result of visits during the preceding year to posts throughout the state, he had acquired the "unspeakably painful intelligence that many old Soldiers had been compelled to accept homes in the County Infirmaries." The total was 382 soldiers.

Brown found this unacceptable, feeling that Ohio's Civil War veterans deserved better and indeed were entitled to some reward by the state for their loyal service. To him the answer was a state soldiers' and sailors' home.

Brown's fellow G.A.R. member, Ohio Governor Foraker, assisted in calling a large meeting of G.A.R. members in mid-February, 1886, and by early March a bill had been introduced in the General Assembly. All G.A.R. posts were provided with a copy and were urged to write in support, which occurred and which resulted in passage of a \$50,000 appropriation by late April. Later bills provided additional funding.

The Home was intended as a residential facility where veterans could live out their lives for free, but it also had hospital and nursing-care facilities for those needing such care. The breathtaking speed with which the idea of a state home was

conceived and made into law was equaled by the rapidity with which the Home itself was built. It took only a little more than two years from the appointment of the first board of trustees in 1886 to the opening of the first buildings in Sandusky in November of 1888.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

Unlike other buildings at the Home, the library employs the local blue limestone as a trim material. The principal wall material is the red sandstone which is used in other buildings only as a trim material.

The Home's buildings generally are constructed in a simple Romanesque Revival style, the hallmarks of which are the extensive use of masonry; a generally massive, heavy feeling; use of round-arched window and door openings (though not exclusively); and a relatively small window-to-wall ratio in comparison with other styles.

The library has a particularly substantial feel, since it has battered foundation walls and a large, heavy arch, supported by clusters of short columns, at its recessed entrance.

Despite its fortress-like feeling and appearance, the library's interior is surprisingly airy and light, the result of its high ceilings and light-colored walls. Windows are fairly narrow but are very tall in the first floor reading and stack rooms, providing plenty of natural light.

2. Condition of fabric:

The library is in good condition. Excessive moisture due to downspout problems has caused growth of moss on portions of the exterior walls, but there are no signs of serious deterioration.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions:

The library measures 71 by 46 feet. It is two stories in height.

2. Foundations:

The building is set on a stone foundation, the foundation material being the local blue limestone. The foundation wall rises about three feet above the ground and has a distinct inward batter. The

bedrock in this area is just a few inches below the surface of the ground, so foundations are not very deep. In the case of the library, construction of the basement required excavation of the underlying bedrock.

3. Walls:

The building is of bearing-wall construction, the material being red sandstone (source unknown), with trim elements of the local blue limestone quarried on the site. The stone is coursed ashlar.

4. Structural system, framing:

Principal exterior and interior walls are of masonry bearing-wall construction, while the rest of the floor and roof structure is of wood. On the second floor are vertical suspenders in the large meeting room, which help to support the floor. Horizontal tie rods were added in this space at some time in the past to resist the outward thrust of the roof structure and walls.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:

The building has none of these features.

6. Chimneys:

The building has no chimneys. The clustered columns which were removed from the parapet walls at some time in the past probably were chimneys serving fireplaces on the interior.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

The library has only one doorway, the main doorway centered in the east elevation. The doorway and first floor wall around it are recessed several feet inside a large archway, which provides weather protection.

The doorway is very plain, with a simple stone lintel dividing the paired wooden doors from a large multiple-paned transom above. The paired doors are wood, with no windows, in a simple paneled design. The doors and transom window appear to be original.

b. Windows and shutters:

All windows appear to be original. They are of wood and are double-hung. On the first floor, the reading and stack rooms have eleven windows each. The curved walls on the east and

west sides have clusters of four windows, while the north and south end walls have clusters of three windows. All the windows are the same, but the east and west windows have round-headed fixed transoms, while the the north and south windows have rectangular transoms.

A small double-hung rectangular window to the right (north) of the entrance door provides light for the stairway to the basement.

On the second floor, originally there were rectangular double-hung windows at the rounded corners. These had large round-headed transoms above, but the transoms were removed at some time in the past, and at the same time the windows were downsized to single-sash square windows. On the north and south walls are three small single-sash windows clustered together, surmounted by large round-headed multiple-paned transoms. On the east and west walls are four rectangular double-hung windows clustered together, the middle two windows surmounted by round-headed transoms.

The library has no shutters.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

The building has a hipped roof which rises to central ridge running north and south. The north and south ends of the roof are rounded to fit the curves of the building's walls.

The roof is covered with red asphalt shingles. Their date of installation is unknown, but they appear to be quite old.

b. Cornice, eaves:

The library has a shallow projecting cornice of blue limestone, into the top of which the gutters are set. The eaves are held back from the cornice and do not project. There are no overhanging eaves.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers:

The library originally had four wall dormers at the curved portions of the walls, plus four more at the building's four end walls. The curved dormers were similar in size and design to those in the north and south end walls, while the dormers on the east and west were much larger.

The curved dormers were removed at some time in the past,

probably during re-roofing, but the other four dormers survive intact.

There never were any cupolas or towers.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement:

The basement is rectangular in plan, with rounded corners as in the rooms above.

b. First floor:

The first floor consists of three spaces, the reading and stack rooms and a central hall. The entrance door in the east elevation leads into a small entry landing, with the basement doorway to the right. A short flight of steps leads up into the wide central hall, which once was divided into two parts by a counter set about a third of the way back in the hall. On the north, over the basement stairway, is an open stairway to the second floor. Ahead and to the left, two doors lead into the oval-shaped reading room, while to the right are two doors into the D-shaped room which once housed the book stacks.

On the second floor, the stairway opens into a work area above the stack room on the first floor. The work area is divided into three rooms by two north-south partitions; these three rooms have the same square footage as the stack room below.

The rest of the second floor is occupied by the large meeting room in the building's southern two-thirds (there is no central hall on this floor). At one time this was the meeting hall of the G.A.R. unit based at the Home.

2. Stairways:

The only stairways are the enclosed one to the basement from the first floor, and the one to the second floor. It is open from the first floor to the landing but becomes enclosed once it turns at the landing and goes up to the second floor.

3. Flooring:

Flooring throughout appears to be hardwood, about four inches in width, and probably tongue-and-groove in design.

4. Wall and ceiling finish:

All interior walls on the first and second floors are plastered and are painted white. There are no wainscots or chair rails, but most walls retain their original wood picture rails mounted high up at transom level.

Ceilings all are plastered and painted white, except in the reading room, which has a painted pressed-metal ceiling.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

All doorways have their original wood doors and trim. Doors into main rooms are eight-panel, while those to smaller or secondary rooms are six-panel.

Main doorways have large rectangular transoms; secondary doorways do not. The transoms are hinged at the top and tilt inward for ventilation. Doorway trim is milled wood in a simple profile.

b. Windows:

All windows are original and are nearly all double-hung sash. Small single-sash windows are used in some parts of the second floor.

Window openings are simply trimmed in a design like that at the doorways.

All woodwork in doors, windows and trim is very dark, looking almost as though these elements were painted black. However, this actually appears to be due to darkening of their varnished surfaces and not to painting.

6. Decorative features and trim:

The library is finished very plainly throughout, the principal decorative features being the stairway and newel post, the fireplaces, and trim such as the picture rail, window and door trim, and the baseboard.

Some of the fireplaces have been removed, while others remain in place. The fireplaces and their mantels are quite small for the large rooms in which they are placed. They are made of brick and are inlaid with small decorative clay tiles.

7. Hardware:

Most hardware appears to be original or at least quite old. It

is very simple in design, made primarily of iron. Many doorknobs appear to be later replacements of original knobs.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:

The library never contained air conditioning or ventilation equipment (ventilation was by means of open windows).

Heating was provided by steam from the boiler house, which was piped underground to the various buildings at the Home. The library was heated by free-standing cast-iron radiators. Most of these have been removed and the building now is unheated.

b. Lighting:

The building had simple, utilitarian lighting. Both bare hanging bulbs and hanging shaded fixtures were used. Electric lighting appears to have been available in the building from the time it was built, or else it became available shortly after construction.

c. Plumbing:

The only plumbing in the building is for a small rest room on the first floor, located in a narrow triangular space to the northwest of the reading room. This rest room has one sink and a commode, with associated plumbing. While the sink is of stone and appears original, all the other fixtures and plumbing appear to be of recent date.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation:

The 100-acre site of the Ohio Veterans' Home is in a southwest-northeast orientation. The entire site is flat, except for the lakes near the west end, where the water surface is several feet below adjacent ground level.

The library is located off the northwest corner of the loop of cottages that once formed the heart of the Home. It sits between the cottages, which it faces to the east, and the Home's administration building and the main long-term care facility (known today as the Giffin B and Giffin A buildings, respectively), which are located just to the west.

The view of the building from the east, looking west toward its main entrance, is framed by large trees. There is a parking lot

just north of the library, and a paved roadway passes a few yards to the west.

2. Historic landscape design:

When the Home opened in 1888, the entire site had very few trees and was quite flat and featureless. Site design appears to have been focused mainly on building placement and roadway location, with a recognition that, in time, trees would grow and fill in some of the open spaces. This has in fact happened, and the site today has numerous large trees.

As originally planned, most of the Home's buildings were concentrated in the eastern half of the site. Thirteen of the cottages formed a ring around the dining hall, and three others were located to the east along an entry road. Utility and support buildings were concentrated along the south edge of the site, and west of the cottages were the library, assembly hall, and nursing and hospital facilities. The lakes formed by quarrying were next to the west, and a cemetery occupied the west end of the site. The entire northern half of the site was always open space. This historic plan remains largely intact today.

3. Outbuildings:

There are no outbuildings associated with the library.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

These are not available.

B. Early Views:

Miller, John C. Souvenir Book of Views, Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home (Sandusky, Ohio: Alvord & Peters Co.), n.d.

Spies, August. Spies' Gallery of Photo-Engravings - Soldiers' and Sailors' Home Sandusky, Ohio, (Sandusky, Ohio: Privately published), 1896.

Witteman, A. Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home Near Sandusky, (New York: The Albertype Co.), 1894.

C. Interviews:

None was conducted.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Board of Trustees minutes, Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home,
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Proceedings of 20th, 21st and 22nd Annual Encampments, Department
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archives.

"Ohio's Pride. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Home," Sandusky
Register, November 19, 1888.

State of Ohio real estate inventory, 1961.

"History of Ohio Veterans' Home," unpublished typescript, n.d.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Beath, Robert B. History of the Grand Army of the Republic
(New York: Bryan, Taylor & Co.), 1889.

Dearing, Mary R. Veterans in Politics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana
State University Press), 1952.

Hiss, James E. "Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home," National
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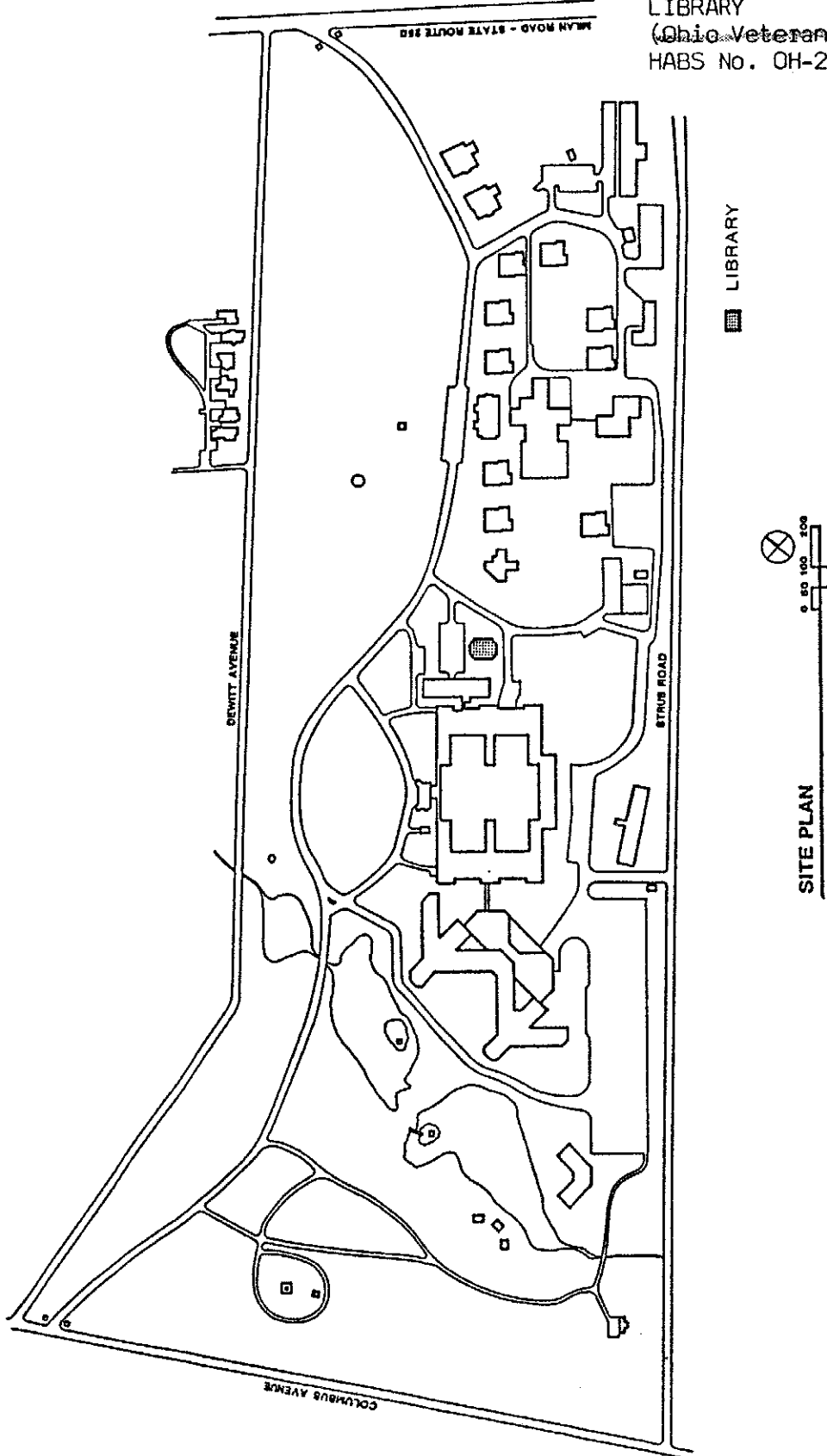
Miller, John C. Insights to Life at the Ohio Soldiers' and
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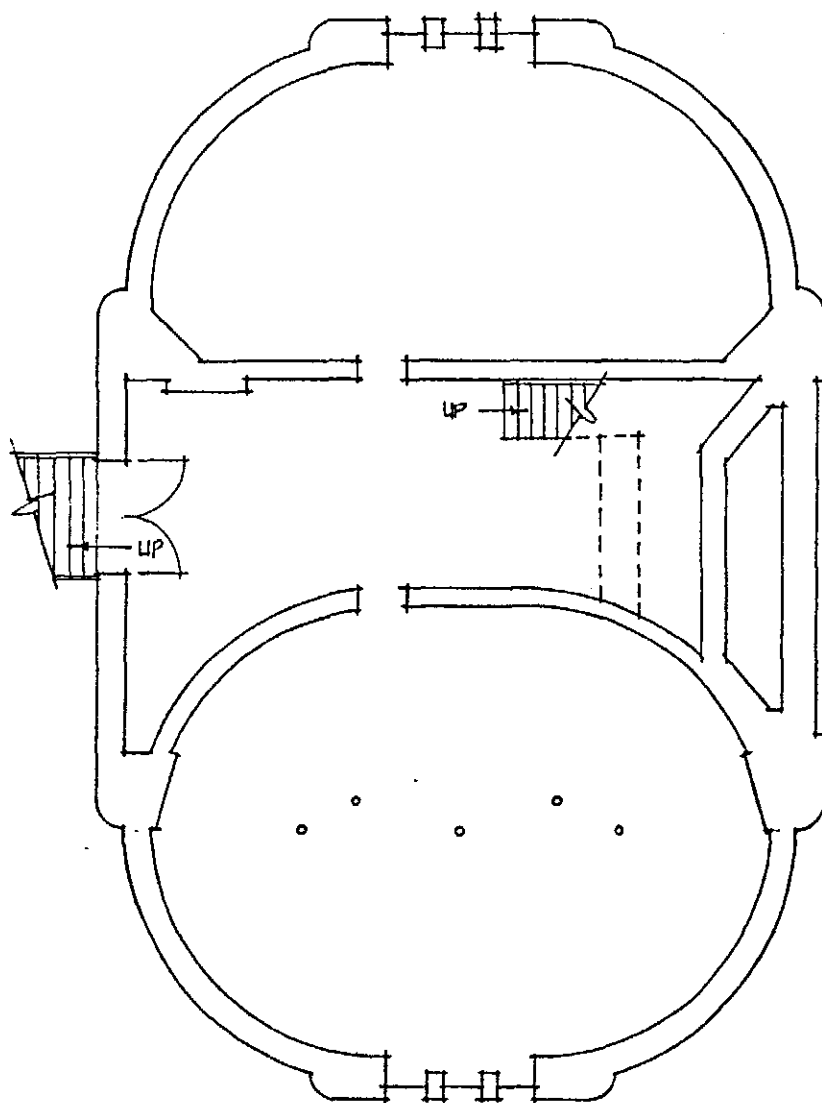
_____. Souvenir Program of the 50th Anniversary,
Ohio Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, 1938.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

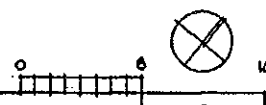
The library sits extremely close to land required for a new domiciliary/
nursing facility to be built at the Ohio Veterans' Home with assistance
from the Veterans' Administration. While the land under the library is not
required for the new building, the new structure will be so close to the
library that emergency equipment access would be interfered with, and code
requirements regarding distances of buildings from each other would be
violated. As a result, the library must be demolished.

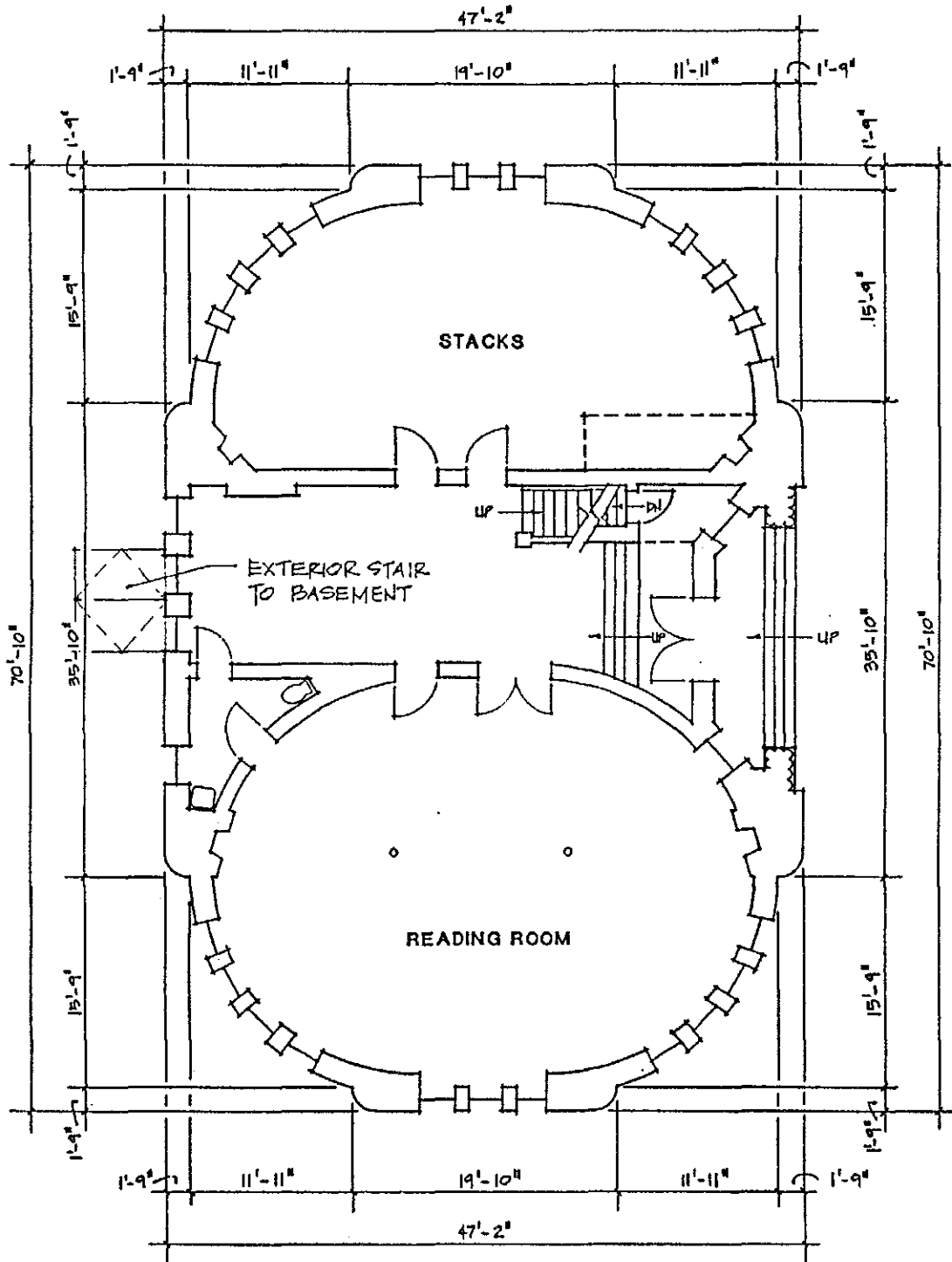
Prepared by: Jeffrey T. Darbee
Title: Historic Preservation Consultant
Affiliation: Benjamin D. Rickey & Co.
Date: November, 1989



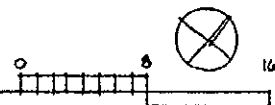


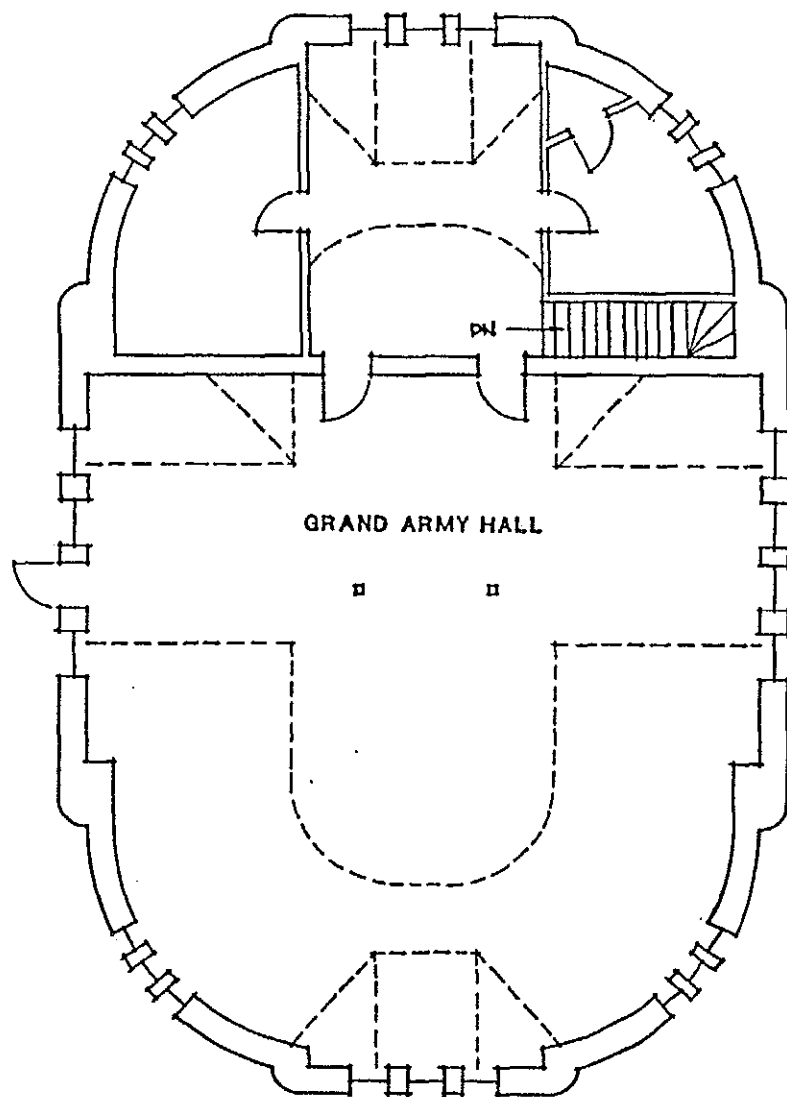
LIBRARY BASEMENT





LIBRARY FIRST FLOOR





LIBRARY SECOND FLOOR

